

Focus and Topic in Gude*

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1. Introduction

This paper discusses the phenomena of focus and topicalization as they occur in Gude. The Gude language is spoken in Nigeria by people living south and east of Mubi in Sardauna Province, North-Eastern State, and by people living in contiguous parts of Mokolo and Guider Provinces in Cameroon. Geographically, the Gude speaking area forms a square 18 miles to a side with Mubi town at the north-west corner. The number of speakers is difficult to determine. Reasonable estimates vary from 40,000 to 80,000 speakers. Approximately two thirds of the Gude speakers live in Nigeria. Gude has been classified by a number of scholars as belonging to the Chadic family of the Afro-asiatic languages. It is in the Bata group of the Biu-Mandara branch. No account of focus and topicalization has yet been published for the Bata group and it is hoped that these data from Gude will be of interest to those engaged in the reconstruction of Proto-Chadic syntax and to those interested in more general questions relating to focus and topicalization in natural language.

2. Focus constructions

Focus constructions have been identified and discussed by many writers, among them Kuno (1972), Schachter (1973), Keenan and Hull (1973) and Gundel (1974). By the term focus construction, I am referring to sentences like (1)-(3):

- (1) The one I saw was John. (pseudo-cleft)
- (2) It was John that I saw. (cleft)
- (3) I saw John. (emphatic stress)

It has often been noted that focus constructions have presuppositions associated with them and that they are appropriate answers for Wh-questions which share those presuppositions. For example, (2) carries the presupposition that the speaker saw someone and is an appropriate answer to the question "Who did you see?" What I am calling focus constructions have been referred to by various authors as focus, emphasis, and foregrounding. I trust that examples (1)-(3) are sufficient for the reader to identify what I mean by focus construction.

In (4) and (5), we see examples of normal non-focus word order in Gude.

(4) Declarative verbal sentences (surface word order)

ASPECT VERB SUB D.O. DIR. I.O. (ADV*)

Ex. agi bele-ne ne John te bwaya endzii

Lit. ASPECT kill John leopard now

'John is killing a leopard now.'

(5) Declarative non-verbal sentences (surface word order)

PRED SUB (ADV*)

Ex. nwanwu ne John endzii

Lit. a chief John now

'John is a chief now.'

Notice that the ne preceding 'John' is a preposition marking subjective case and the te preceding 'leopard' is a preposition marking objective case. In order to limit the length of this paper, we will restrict ourselves to consideration of positive verbal sentences related to example (4).

There are two distinct types of focus constructions in Gude, which I will here refer to as Types I and II. Candidates for focus element include any of the constituent items listed in (4), excluding the ASPECT particle, in other words the VERB, SUB, D.O. DIR., I.O., and any of the possible sentence adverbs. Examples of the various possible focus elements in Type I constructions are given in (6a) through (6d). These are to be contrasted with (4). In (6a) focus is on the subject, in (6b) on the direct object, in (6c) on the verb, and in (6d) on the adverb.

Focus Constructions--Type I.

- (6) a. John ci a-bele bwaya endzii
 Lit. John ASPECT kill leopard now
 'John is killing a leopard now.'
- b. te bwaya ci John a-bele endzii
 Lit. leopard ASPECT John kill now
 'John is killing a leopard now.'
- c. bele-ne ci John a-bele te bwaya endzii
 Lit. killing ASPECT John kill leopard now
 'John is killing a leopard now.'
- d. endzii ci John a-bele te bwaya
 Lit. now ASPECT John kill leopard
 'John is killing a leopard now.'

The surface structures of Type I focus constructions contrast with those of simple non-focus sentences in a number of ways: first, the focus element is found in initial position in the focus construction, preceding the ASPECT. Secondly, the ASPECT particle is represented by a distinct allomorph in the focus construction. The ASPECT particle allomorphs are displayed in (7):

(7)	Declarative	Focus
CONTINUATIVE	<u>agi</u>	<u>ci</u>
POTENTIAL	<u>ka</u>	<u>ne</u>
COMPLETIVE	<u>ke</u>	<u>o</u>

The allomorphs in the first column are found in simple non-focus sentences and the allomorphs in the second column in focus constructions. Thirdly, there is a general verb subject inversion, so that the order of constituents in the focus construction is FOCUS-ELEMENT, ASPECT-PARTICLE, then SUB preceding VERB, etc. Fourthly, the focus element occurs with the preposition appropriate to the position it would hold in normal non-focus word order. Thus, in (6b) the initial preposition te preceding the focus element is the direct object marker appropriate to the role it would have in non-focus sentence (4). Fifthly, there is no trace of the focus element to be found in the corresponding position it would hold in normal word order. We see that Type I focus constructions differ radically from non-focus sentences.

The second type of focus construction we will discuss has the overt structure of a non-verbal sentence.¹ The structure of non-verbal sentences is exemplified in (5) above. We see that the constituent order in non-verbal sentences is PRED SUB (ADV*). The ne before John in (5) is a preposition marking subjective case. Examples of possible Type II focus constructions are given in (8a) through (8d). The examples have been chosen so that they are semantically equivalent to the corresponding Type I examples (6a) through (6d). If one were to invert the PRED SUB order in (8a) through (8d) and insert the English verb to be before the PRED the result would be an English pseudo-cleft sentence. In (8a) focus is on the subject, in (8b) on the direct object, in (8c) on the verb, and (8d) on the adverb.

Focus Constructions--Type II

- (8) a. John ne ende-te ci a-bele te
 John the one (who) ASPECT kill
bwaya endzii
 leopard now
 'The one that is killing a leopard now is John.'
- b. bwaya ne se-te ci John a-bele endzii
 leopard thing (which) John kill now
 'The thing that John is killing now is a leopard.'
- c. bele-ne ne se-te ci John a-da te bwaya
 killing thing ASPECT John do leopard
endzii
 now.
 'What John is doing to a leopard now is killing (it).'
- d. endzii ne saa'i-te ci John a-bele te bwaya
 now time ASPECT John kill leopard
 'When John is killing a leopard is now.'

Wh-questions and relative clauses are syntactically similar to Type I focus constructions. Wh-questions are exemplified in (9a) through (9d). Again the examples are constructed so as to correspond to the focus constructions above.

Wh-questions

- (9) a. Wu ci a-bələ tə bwaya əndzii kwa
 Who ASPECT kill leopard now Q
 'Who is killing a leopard now?'
- b. tə mi ci John a-bələ əndzii kwa
 what John kill now Q
 'What is John killing now?'
- c. Mi ci John a-da tə bwaya əndzii kwa
 What do Q
 'What is John doing to a leopard now?'
- d. guci ci John a-bələ tə bwaya kwa
 when Q
 'When is John killing a leopard?'

Examples of relative clauses are found embedded in (8a) through (8d). A detailed comparison of these structures is beyond the scope of this paper. It will suffice to say only that Wh-questions, relative clauses, and Type I focus constructions look very similar and contrast with non-focus sentences in the same ways. Keenan and Hull (1973) have pointed out that such a similarity between Wh-questions, relative clauses, and focus constructions is quite common in languages of the world.

As regards the derivation of focus constructions, Type II seems to be accounted for by the rules which would be needed to derive ordinary non-verbal sentences. As we noted before, the surface structure of Type II is indistinguishable from non-verbal sentences. However, the surface structure of Type I is not at all obvious. I suggest that we assume the surface structure to be that of FOCUS-ELEMENT somehow adjoined to the left of a SENTENCE. If that is the case, how might this surface structure be derived? There are a number of alternative solutions.

One analysis might be to derive Type I constructions from sentences with underlying non-focus constituent order. These sentences would have a [+EMPHASIS] feature attached to the focus element. A movement rule would then carry the focus element to the front of the sentence and trigger all of the appropriate changes. A movement rule, however, forces us to make *ad hoc* adjustments, and an underlying sentence with a [+EMPHASIS] feature attached to some node would not seem to be an appropriate semantic structure. Depending on one's favorite syntactic theory, one would need either an *ad hoc* mapping from a semantic representation to this intermediate shallow structure, or alternatively, an *ad hoc* mapping from this deep structure to some semantic interpretation. A movement rule would also deny any relationship between Type I and Type II, and it would not explain why the focus element appears as initial element in the sentence. Furthermore, a movement rule would not account for the syntactic similarity noted earlier between relative clauses and Type I constructions, such as the form of the ASPECT particle, VERB SUB inversion, etc.²

A second analysis might be to derive Type I constructions from embedded questions. This proposal would be analogous to certain proposals which have been made for English clefts and pseudo-clefts.

This proposal is rather weak since there is little in the surface form of Gude focus constructions that would suggest their being derived from embedded questions.

A third analysis, and the one I believe to be correct, would be to derive Type I from semantically equivalent Type II. This would be analogous to a proposal to derive English cleft sentences from pseudo-clefts. Consider (8a). In Type II example (8a), the SUB consists of a head noun ənde-tə meaning the one and a modifying relative clause. Now consider (6a). To derive (6a), the Type I equivalent, from (8a) we need only delete this head noun and its case marking preposition nə. This deletion leaves us with the required string of elements and with a plausible surface structure. As for changes in the ASPECT particle, VERB SUB inversion and so forth, these changes would have taken place in the formation of the relative clause a cycle earlier than the optional deletion. Thus, the syntactic similarity between Type I and relative clauses is elegantly accounted for.

The only apparent counterexample to this deletion proposal is the presence of prepositions with focus elements in certain Type I constructions but not in Type II. For example, note the preposition tə in (6b). It is a preposition marking objective case, and is not present in (8b). I think it is necessary to resolve this problem with a rule which would move the appropriate preposition from the relative clause embedded in the subject and attach it to the predicate noun. We encounter an analogous problem if we try to derive English cleft sentences from pseudo-clefts. Compare (10a) through (11b):

- (10) a. The place where I saw John was Boston.
(pseudo-cleft)
- b. The place I saw John in was Boston. (pseudo-cleft)
- (11) a. It was Boston that I saw John in. (cleft)
- b. It was in Boston that I saw John. (cleft)

Most English speakers seem to accept (10a) in which the predicate noun Boston occurs without any preposition. Some speakers will accept (10b). For those speakers, (11a) is also acceptable. I hope that those who do not find (10b) or (11a) acceptable will agree that the offending preposition seems only to be non-standard or redundant but is not objectionable on semantic grounds. Finally, most speakers seem to accept (11b). In (11b) the preposition occurs with the noun Boston. If (11b) derives from (10a) or (10b), then why does the preposition in appear before the predicate noun in (11b)?

I assert that the proposed Gude rule copying the preposition out of the relative clause up onto the predicate noun is not ad hoc and in fact is required to explain the derivation of (11b). Thus, my proposal is to derive Type I focus constructions from Type II by deletion and preposition movement.

3. Topicalization

A few sketchy accounts of topicalization in Chadic languages have appeared, specifically the works of D. Burquest (1972), P.

Newman (1971), and R. Schuh. However, I suspect that topicalization in Chadic languages is probably far more common and widespread than reports would suggest.

In a topicalized Gude sentence, such as (12a), the topic, in this case John, is prementioned. The topic is bracketed by pauses, and is optionally preceded by the marker ma. The topic is followed by a comment-sentence in which the topic-element is often pronominalized or deleted. Previous accounts of topicalization in Chadic languages have been limited to object fronting, but examples (12a) through (12d) show that for Gude the same constituent items which were candidates for focus element are also candidates for topic.

- (12) a. (ma) John (-a), agi bəle-nə nə ci tə bwaya ɛndzii
he
'(As for) John, he is killing a leopard now.'
b. (ma) bwaya (-a), agi bəle-nə nə John tə ci ndzii
it
'(As for) the leopard, John is killing it now.'
c. (ma) bəle-nə (-a), agi bəle-nə nə John tə
bwaya ɛndzii
'(As for) killing, John is killing a leopard now.'
d. (ma) ɛndzii (-a), agi bəle-nə nə John tə bwaya
'(As for what's happening) now, John is killing
a leopard.'

4. Conclusion

Topic should not be confused with focus element. The two are syntactically and semantically distinct. I have already illustrated the syntactic differences. The semantic difference is easily understood if we consider the Prague School notions *theme* and *rheme*. The theme (or topic) contains old discourse information. What we have called topic in this paper corresponds to the theme, and what we have called focus element corresponds to rheme.³ Topicalization is a means of overtly marking what the sentence is about. Consider the gloss for (12a): 'As for John, he is killing the leopard.' In (12a) the sentence is about John. John is the theme. Now compare the gloss for (6a): 'John is killing a leopard.' This sentence is telling us who killed the leopard. The person who killed a leopard is the theme of the sentence. For focus element John is not the theme.

Footnotes

*This brief paper is based on data collected and tested in Nigeria between July 1970 and June 1974 while I was studying Gude under a cooperative agreement between the Institute of Linguistics (a branch of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, Inc.) and Amadu Bello University.

This paper was also produced with the assistance of a concordance of Gude texts made by computer at the University of Oklahoma under NSF grant GS-1605.

¹By non-verbal sentence, I am referring to the class of sentences we usually think of as copula sentences, but in the case of Gude there is nothing corresponding to a copula.

²Movement rules are not involved in Gude relative clause formation, but there is evidence for optional deletion.

³The notions are not equivalent however. A sentence may have a theme without having an overt 'topic', and a sentence may have a rheme without having a focus element (cf. Gundel 1974).

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